

[1st September 1959]

Village Officers

* 60-B Q.—SRI K. SATTANATHA KARAYALAR (on behalf of SRI M. KALYANASUNDARAM): Will the Hon. the Minister for Revenue be pleased to state with reference to question No. 702 answered on 10th April 1958—

(a) whether the Government have reached any decision regarding the village establishments and officers; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE HON. SRI M. A. MANICKAVELU: (a) The matter is still under the consideration of the Government.

(b) Does not arise.

MR. SPEAKER: Questions are over.

[Note.—An asterisk (*) at the commencement of a speech indicates revision by the Member.]

II.—STATEMENT BY THE HON. SPEAKER *RE* QUESTIONS.

MR. SPEAKER: May I crave the indulgence of the House for a few minutes? I want to read to you a note on a matter of very vital importance which affects the relationship of the hon. Members and the Speaker. There has been a lot of misunderstanding and I should like to clear the same. That is with regard to questions.

Generally speaking, Members of all Legislative bodies evince great interest in putting questions; as, asking questions on matters of public importance, is the free and unfettered right of Members of every Legislative body. It is vital in public interest to utilize the question hour to the best advantage and as far as practicable it should be confined to questions which refer to matters of public importance. If greater discrimination is exercised by hon. Members in the selection of subjects on which they table questions, the value of the question hour can be greatly enhanced. The idea of putting a question should be to bring home to the Government important matters of administration. It is also imperative that the time of the House should not be wasted on ordinary and unimportant matters.

Normally a question should not give rise to a debate as the usual time for answering a question is about two minutes and secondly a question must be worth asking, from the point of view of the House. Rules 22 to 39 of the Madras Assembly Rules deal with questions and are fairly exhaustive. There are however certain fundamental principles involved which I would like to clarify.

1. A question should relate to a matter of public importance. This has to be decided by the Hon. Speaker. For example, if a Member asks as to how many high schools are in the State of Madras, he is asking for information, but there is no public importance involved in it.

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2. Questions which require long answers and statistics from taluks and districts cannot normally form the subject-matter of questions. These statistics can be got either from the Administration Report or Budget papers or from the departments concerned. It may be that the statistics in public records are not upto date. But that cannot be regarded for considering a question as one of public importance.

3. Questions asking whether there is any proposal, etc., are also normally not allowed, for, very often after verification in the department concerned it has been found that there is no such proposal at all. Invariably such questions are put with a view to suggest action.

4. Questions on reports arising from newspapers are also not normally permitted. The correctness of such information has to be verified before questions are put.

5. Questions on subjects which are already under the consideration of either the Estimates Committee or the Assurance Committee are normally not allowed. These Committees are constituted by the Legislature and when matters are under consideration of such Committees, questions about them are not allowed.

6. Questions asking for district-war and taluk-war statistics for periods ranging from one to ten years are also normally not allowed. Even if they are allowed, they can only be allowed as unstarred questions, as they take up much of the time of the House during question hour and prevent more important questions being answered.

7. Questions about local grievances or on trivial matters are also not allowed. For example, a member gives notice of a question as to whether a well in a village will be repaired or a road leading to that village will be taken up for construction. These may be matters of local importance and may be important as far as that village is concerned. But in a place like the Assembly Chamber matters which have a much wider application should be brought. It is not customary to admit questions unless there is public importance of a fairly important nature. The Members themselves can write to the Department concerned or to the Ministers concerned and get the defect remedied. Resorting to the short cut method of raising questions on matters of local or individual grievances on the floor of the House is not usually permitted.

8. Questions relating to individual or parochial grievances are also not allowed. There are other remedies provided for ventilating these grievances. The Assembly cannot be the forum for ventilating grievances of such individuals.

9. Questions given notice of and relating to administration of Panchayat Boards, District Boards and statutory bodies like the Electricity Board are also not normally allowed. These bodies

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may be getting financial assistance from the Government, but the Government cannot interfere with their day to day administration. So such questions also cannot be admitted. But the Speaker will, however, allow questions which arise out of their relation with the Government or refer to breaches of law or rules or relate to important matters involving general welfare.

The number of questions have also, of late, been increasing. The average number of questions answered daily during the last three Sessions is given below:—

Fourth Session—1,091 questions answered on 27 sittings.

Fifth Session—1,204 questions answered on 34 sittings.

Sixth Session—331 questions answered on 9 sittings.

Now, we have had 2,412 questions and we will have to see how many of these will be admitted and answered. Roughly giving on an average between 35 and 40 questions per day, on an average about 1½ to 2 minutes are available for each question. So, hon. Members will realise my difficulty if I am unable to allow too many supplementary questions on each question. Preference will be given to those who put questions. As in all parliamentary matters, the member who put the question will have the privilege of asking the supplementary question first. If there is time enough, other hon. Members will have a chance.

In view of the statement made above, I have had to disallow a number of questions. I have so far disallowed 645 questions out of 2,275 questions as on 15—8—1959 for the following reasons:—

1 Not a matter of public interest	67
2 Not a matter of Government concern	85
3 Suggestion for action	28
4 Subject matter of questions pursued by Parliamentary Committees like the Assurance Committee, the Estimates Committee, etc.	31
5 Covered by procedure laid down in Acts, Rules, etc.	37
6 Too general and not specific	36
7 Deals with big policy issues	8
8 Calls for elaborate statistics	18
9 Too early to ask questions	10
(The Minister would have given an assurance. But within three months the members would like to know as to what happened. But it would be too early to come to any decision.)	
10 Information available in published documents or records or reports, etc.	41

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11 Covered by questions already answered or covered by answers to lapsed questions.	64
12 Other forms of remedy available	13
13 Questions relating to parochial and local grievances. (In many cases the members have been requested to get information from the concerned local authorities direct. The Department also in certain cases have been requested to furnish information direct to members.)	196
14 Questions re. interpretation of provisions of Constitution	1
15 Questions of excessive length (The question itself runs to 3 pages.).	1
16 Mere renewal of lapsed questions without replying to this Department's D.Os. (My Department writes to the members asking for certain clarification or askin why a particular question should not be disallowed. Members do not reply and still they blame the Speaker for not allowing their questions).	8
17 Questions relating to hypothetical propositions	1
	<hr/> 645 <hr/>

Out of 2,275 questions received during the period from 15th June to 15th August 1959, 645 questions have been so far disallowed. I am mentioning this because I want the co-operation of the Members in adjusting the business of the House. If I disallow a question I would like the members to take that in a sporting spirit and not write to me such nasty letters which, if I only permit them to be placed before this House, the Members who wrote them will be ashamed of. I hope I will have the co-operation of the Members in this respect.

Sri A. Govindasamy and some other hon. Members rose.

MR. SPEAKER: There cannot be a discussion on this matter. This is what I am proposing to do. Hon. Members cannot question it. If some hon. Members are going to find fault with me for that, they have got other remedies.

SRI A. GOVINDASAMY: I want a copy of your statement, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER: I will try to supply the hon. Members with copies of the same.